


BLACK LABEL
89 | **17+**
JUL 26 | MATURE

SWAMP THING

SUGGESTED
FOR MATURE
READERS

Rick Veitch
Tom Mandrake
Trish Mulvihill



VEITCH
MULVIHILL

PUBLISHORIAL

RICH ♦ HANDLEY

There's something deliciously chaotic about ghosts, who remind us of unfinished business and refuse to stay put. Just when we think we understand them, they change their own rules. So it's appropriate that as Rick Veitch's *SWAMP THING* continues its fearless tour through DC's metaphysics, a classic ghoul drifts back into the bog-god's orbit.

The Spectre...or is it?

No, it's just the slaying soul's human host, Jim Corrigan. The undead detective has been loaned to Rick for a brief crossover with John Constantine in *SWAMP THING* #89. (Fret not, continuity-minded readers. This story takes place **after** the cyberspace saga in *THE SPECTRE*'s Ghosts in the Machine arc.)

The Ghostly Guardian debuted nearly 50 years ago. Hitting stands at the tail end of 1939, *MORE FUN COMICS* #52 introduced the green-tinted spirit of vengeance, in a story reprinted in 1973's *SECRET ORIGINS* #5. Created by Jerry Siegel and Bernard Baily, the Spectre was among the Golden Age's strangest superheroes.

The murdered Corrigan, denied eternal rest, returned to the mortal plane as a supernatural force meting out the Lord's justice. Other heroes punched gangsters and chased spies, but the Spectre judged. He **punished**. He terrified criminals, vanquishing evil with a severity bordering on biblical. With his eerie emerald glow and skull-like countenance, the Spectre was a walking warning to wrongdoers.

In his earliest stories, Corrigan wasn't simply an alter ego or convenient host. He was a human conscience anchoring a being of nearly limitless power. Corrigan was the man, the Spectre **the sentence**. During the decade of the Second World War, the Spectre softened. He joined the Justice Society of America, standing alongside heroes who fought for democracy and decency. The Spectre was the team's nuclear option, summoned to handle dire situations. He became...if not exactly neighborly...at least cooperative.

Of course, ghosts don't like to stay comfortable. Restlessness is at their core. So one can't help but wonder whether the Spectre quietly hoped the Justice League might have room for him...assuming anyone was brave enough to send an invitation. Or whether Corrigan might miss friendship, love, and being part of something greater than the call for vengeance...

By the fifties, the Spectre had faded from view, lingering in the nebulous shadows of DC history like a half-remembered nightmare. When he returned in the Silver Age for *SHOWCASE* and *ADVENTURE COMICS*, the pendulum swung back toward horror. Under writer Michael Fleisher, artist Jim Aparo, and editor Joe Orlando, the Spectre became something startlingly different.

Fleisher's Spectre did not merely punish criminals. He **obliterated** them. Bodies twisted, souls shattered, and blood splattered as the Wrath of God delivered poetic justice with cruel inventiveness—superhero comics colliding head-on with E.C.-style morality tales. Love sprung anew for Corrigan, who nearly married Gwen Sterling. But then he died again, and that love was forever lost. The result was unforgettable, yet the sidelined Corrigan became a faint human echo beneath an avalanche of supernatural wrath.

Readers noticed. So did we.

That era forced DC to confront some of *THE SPECTRE*'s central questions: How much vengeance is **too** much? If justice is blind, should it also be merciless? And where does Corrigan fit when the Spectre no longer needs him?

Those questions lingered long after *ADVENTURE COMICS* abruptly ended, but last year's *WRATH OF*

THE SPECTRE reunited Aparo with the titular super-phantom to bring Fleisher's unpublished scripts to life. That miniseries wasn't mere nostalgia, but an opportunity to reexamine Fleisher's brutal incarnation in context, and to let readers see the danger of a Spectre unmoored from humanity.

Guided by Doug Moench, *THE SPECTRE*'s modern era has restored that balance. With the eighties coming to a close, who knows where this will lead our spectral antagonist? (Look, I coined a new term!) It's remarkably difficult to classify the Spectre. Ghosts are unpredictable, this one especially, and so is his handsome, hard-boiled human host.

Doug's *SPECTRE* repositioned Corrigan as more than a footnote, a murdered cop dragged along for the ride. The man with the Jason Blood-like skunk-stripe has reemerged as a supernatural detective who actively grapples with his mystical half's ruthless morality. In recent months, the two have fully merged, with Corrigan forced to helplessly witness the Spectre's murders.

The Spectre is still terrifying, still awe-inspiring. But now he is questioned, challenged, and at times restrained. No longer just God's executioner, the ghost is an instrument struggling to understand the music he's meant to play. That evolution is very much in step with DC's storytelling this past decade. Characters have become more introspective, morality more complicated. The line between hero and monster has blurred. Few characters embody that tension so completely as the Spectre.

Which brings us to *SWAMP THING*. Rick's extraordinary time odyssey has expanded the series' boundaries, his stories encompassing ecology, mythology, theology, and the nature of authorship. Into this macabre muck and mire steps the Spectre, who previously overlapped Alec Holland's world in *SWAMP THING* #49-50 and *ANNUAL* #2, and in *DC CHALLENGE*. Considering the cosmic questions posited in the *SWAMP THING* revival, it makes sense that one of DC's oldest cosmic answers would come calling. It's cosmological symmetry.

For the Spectre, stepping back into *SWAMP THING*'s verdant world provides a crucial reminder that vengeance without understanding is empty, power without purpose hollow. Corrigan's humanity...his doubts, ethics, and stubborn insistence on seeing individuals rather than abstractions...remains the Spectre's most important limitation, yet his greatest strength.

The Spectre has been a crime-fighting superhero, an unstoppable killing mist, a cosmic force wrestling with its mandate, and even briefly a fourth-wall-breaking horror host. Corrigan, meanwhile, has been a cop, victim, and conscience, and now something rare in comics: a human negotiating with the divine.

Fifty years after his debut, the Spectre remains one of DC's most challenging characters, refusing to stay neatly categorized and consistent. Like any good ghost, he reminds us that the past is never **truly** past. *THE SPECTRE* #29 hits stands next month, so stick around, because Doug has many more stories to tell.

As this Golden Age icon reaches his golden anniversary, Rick Veitch takes this golden opportunity to team up the Astral Avenger with the chain-smoking mage. As *SWAMP THING*'s regular readers know, Constantine is a man with connections. Many have brushed shoulders with the Hellblazer, owed him a debt, or offered him a favor.

Even Jim Corrigan.

—Rascally Riotous Rich,
Rick's Roguish Raconteur

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The Blackhawks begin to realize that the CIA has sent them on a mission designed to *kill* them! ■▶▲

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A tour of the DP's mountain HQ shines the spotlight on Dorothy Spinner and some very deadly friends she brought along. ■▶

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JUSTICE LEAGUE EUROPE 5

Sapphire Stagg shows up at the JLE Embassy with Metamorpho's baby. Trouble is . . . he doesn't remember any of the details! ●

POWER OF THE ATOM 15

The Atom must unravel the secret of Gestalt if he's to save the life of an old friend. Plus—more of the mysterious Humbug. ●

STARMAN 13

A double date leads to double trouble for Will and for Starman, as the Parasite and Rampage arrive in town. ●

ADVENTURES OF SUPERMAN 457

Superman brings Matrix back to Smallville when her life as Clark Kent becomes too much for Metropolis to handle! ●

BATMAN 437

"Batman: Year Three" Part Two has Batman and the original Robin track down Boss Zucco, the man who murdered Robin's parents. ●

SWAMP THING 89

The Shining Knight returns with a tale of Swamp Thing's demise, as John Constantine trails history for a way to bring him home. ■▶▲

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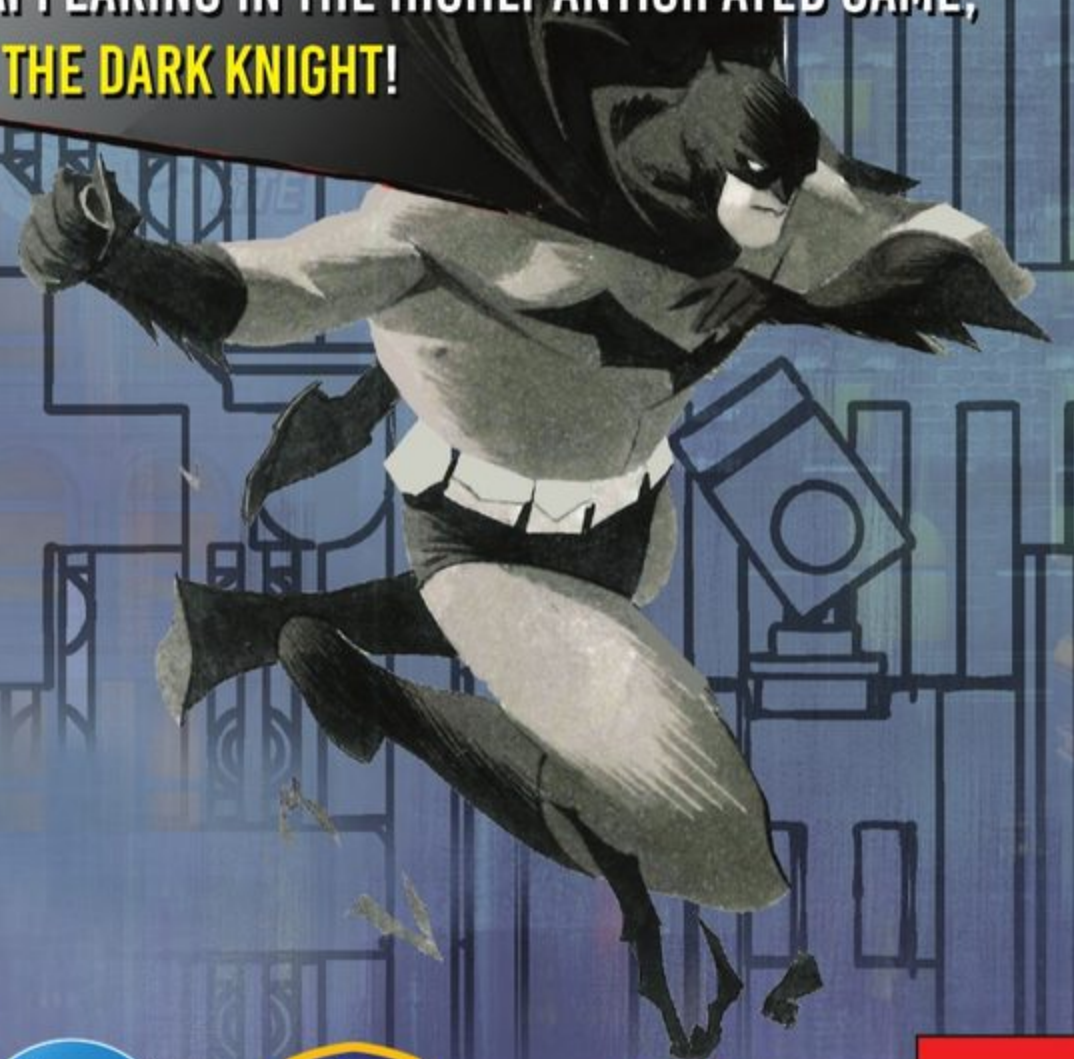
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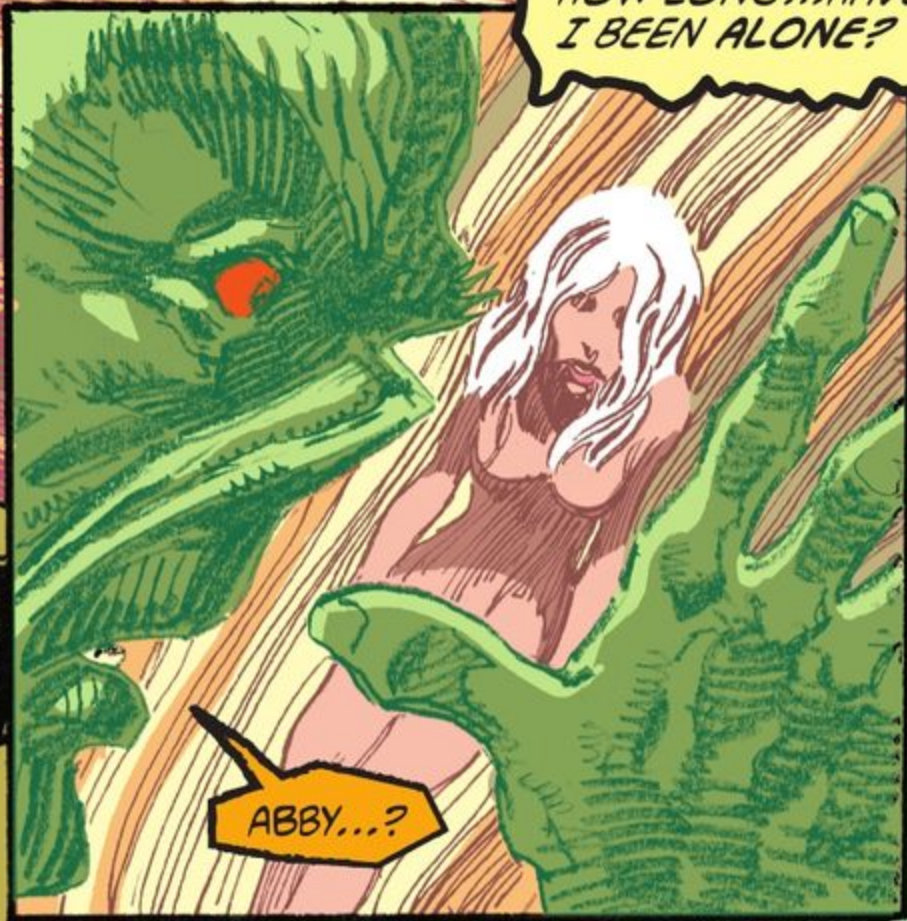


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HOW LONG...HAVE I BEEN LOST...
IN THE BILLING SANDS OF TIME?



HOW LONG...HAVE
I BEEN ALONE?



ABBY...?

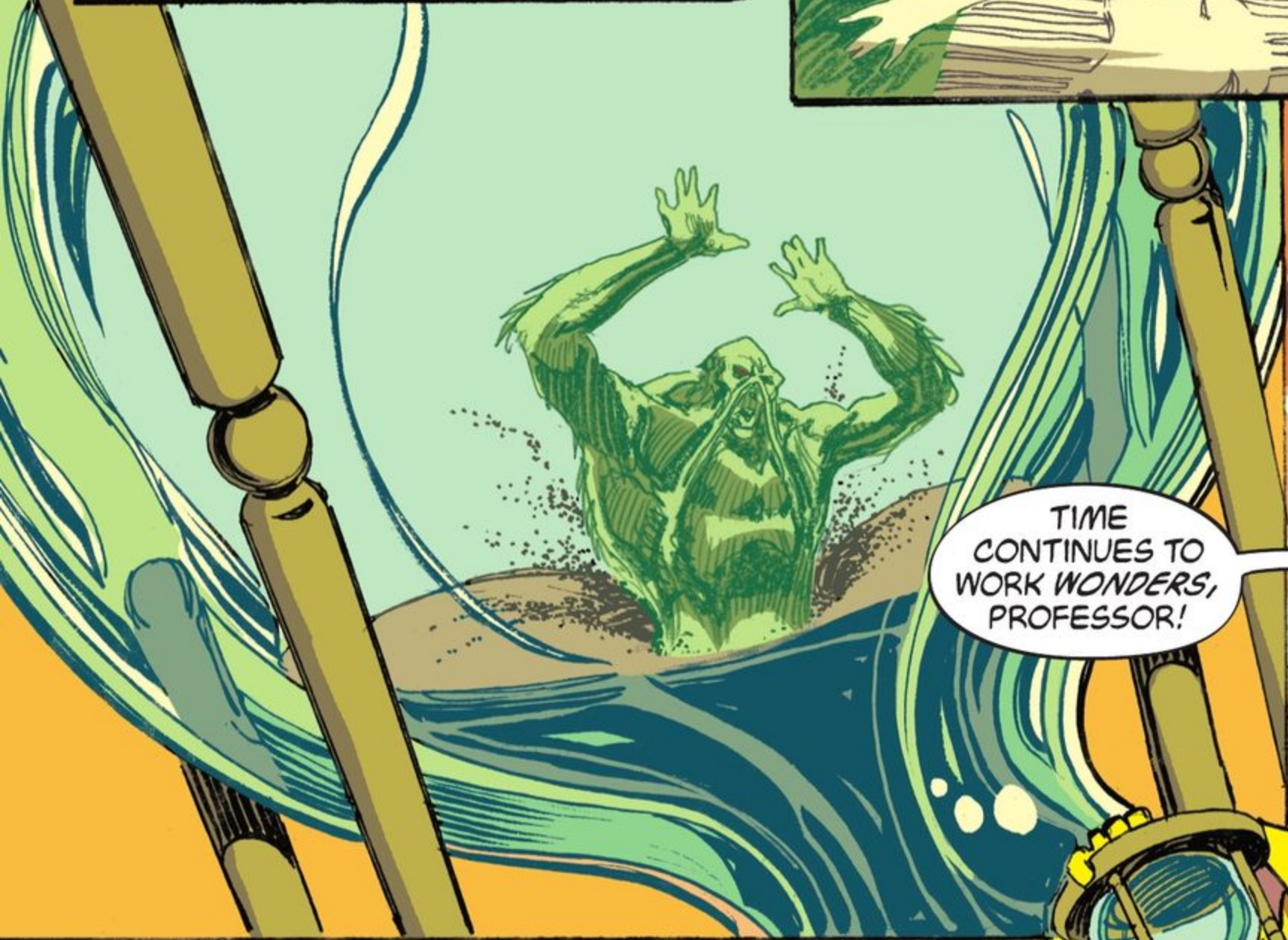


ABBY...OH, ABBY!
I'VE MISSED YOU...
SO MUCH!



NO!
PLEASE...

NOT...
AGAIN...



TIME
CONTINUES TO
WORK WONDERS,
PROFESSOR!

YET ANOTHER
TIMEWORN TRAVELER
HAS LANDED ON OUR
DOORSTEP!







HERE'S AN
EXTRA TENNER,
TRIXIE. SORRY
THINGS GOT SO
CHAOTIC.

YOU'RE A REAL
TROUPER.



YEAH, WELL, *NEXT*
TIME IF YOU WANT THE
SNAKE IT'S GONNA COST
YOU *DOUBLE*,
CONSTANTINE!



THANK YOU FOR
HELPING ME ATTAIN
MY *HUMAN FORM*,
JOHN.

THERE ARE SOME
THINGS EVEN I CAN
ONLY ACCOMPLISH AS
JIM CORRIGAN.



THE WAY I SEE
IT, JIMMY? NOW THAT
I'VE GIVEN YOU AND
THE SPECTRE SOME
ALONE TIME FROM
EACH OTHER...

...I'VE
JUST MADE
A TIDY
DEPOSIT IN
HIS FAVOR
BANK!

FUCK
ME!



YOU DID A
WORKING FOR THE
SPECTRE?

NO REST
FOR THE WICKED,
CHAS.

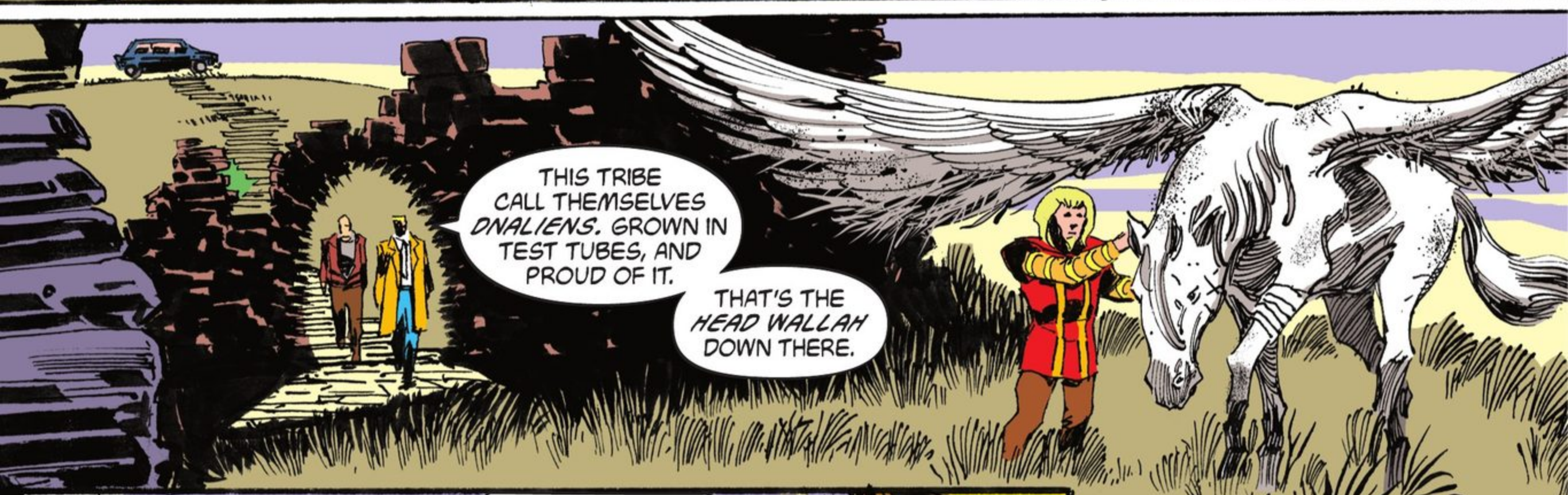
SO, YOUR
CHARIOT UP FOR
A ROADER OUT TO
CORNWALL?





WHAT ABOUT THESE HAIRIES, JOHN-- ARE THEY, LIKE... HUMAN?

DO ANY HIPPIES QUALIFY AS HUMAN?



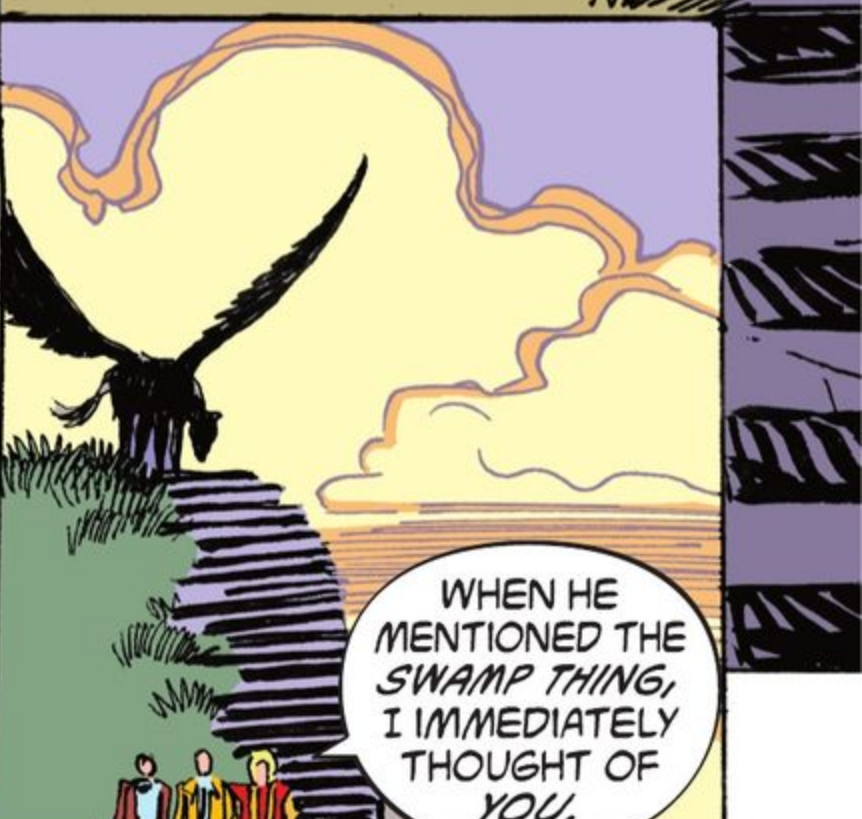
THIS TRIBE CALL THEMSELVES DNALIENS. GROWN IN TEST TUBES, AND PROUD OF IT.

THAT'S THE HEAD WALLAH DOWN THERE.

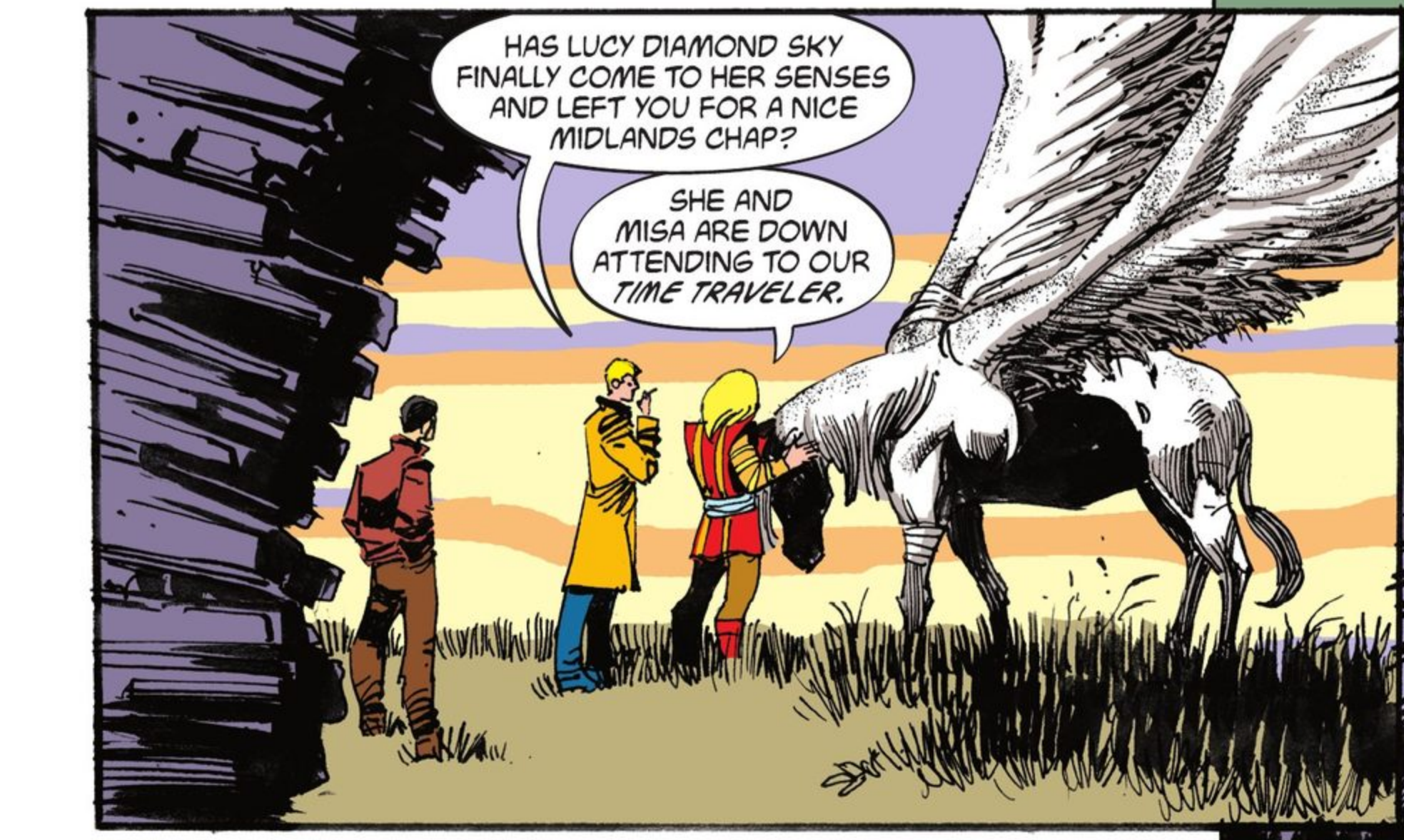


LOOK WHO FINALLY FOUND US! I ALMOST DIDN'T RECOGNIZE YOU WITHOUT THE MOHAWK AND DOG COLLAR, JOHN.

YOU'RE EASY TO TRACK DOWN, JUDE. WE JUST FOLLOWED THE OVERPOWERING SCENT OF PATCHOULI OIL.

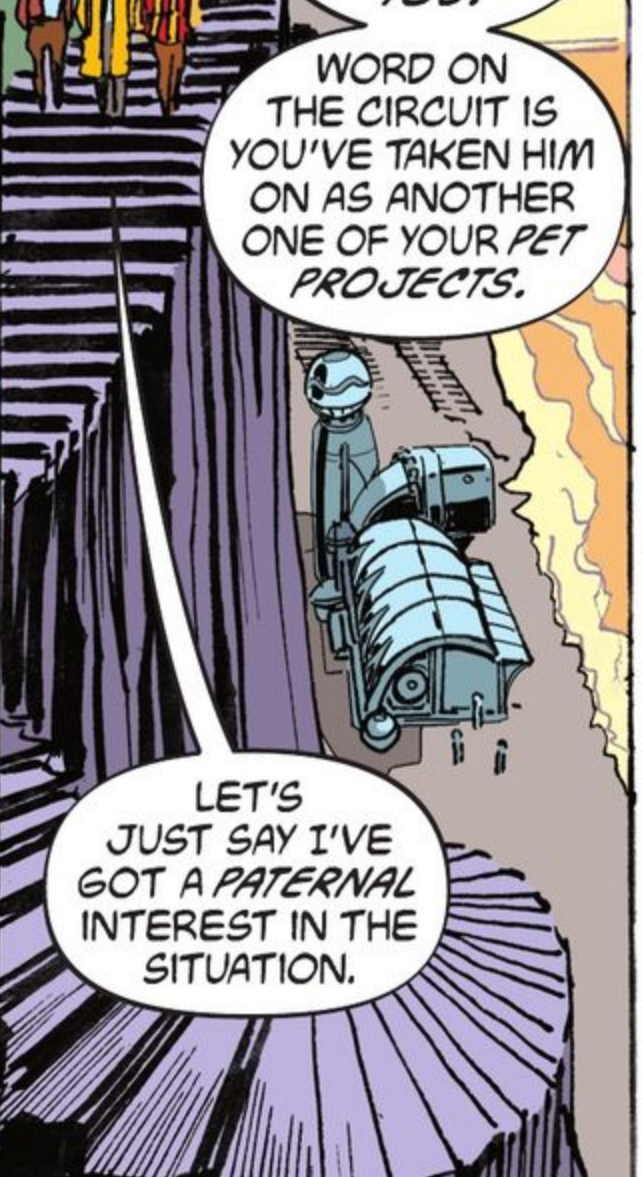


WHEN HE MENTIONED THE SWAMP THING, I IMMEDIATELY THOUGHT OF YOU.



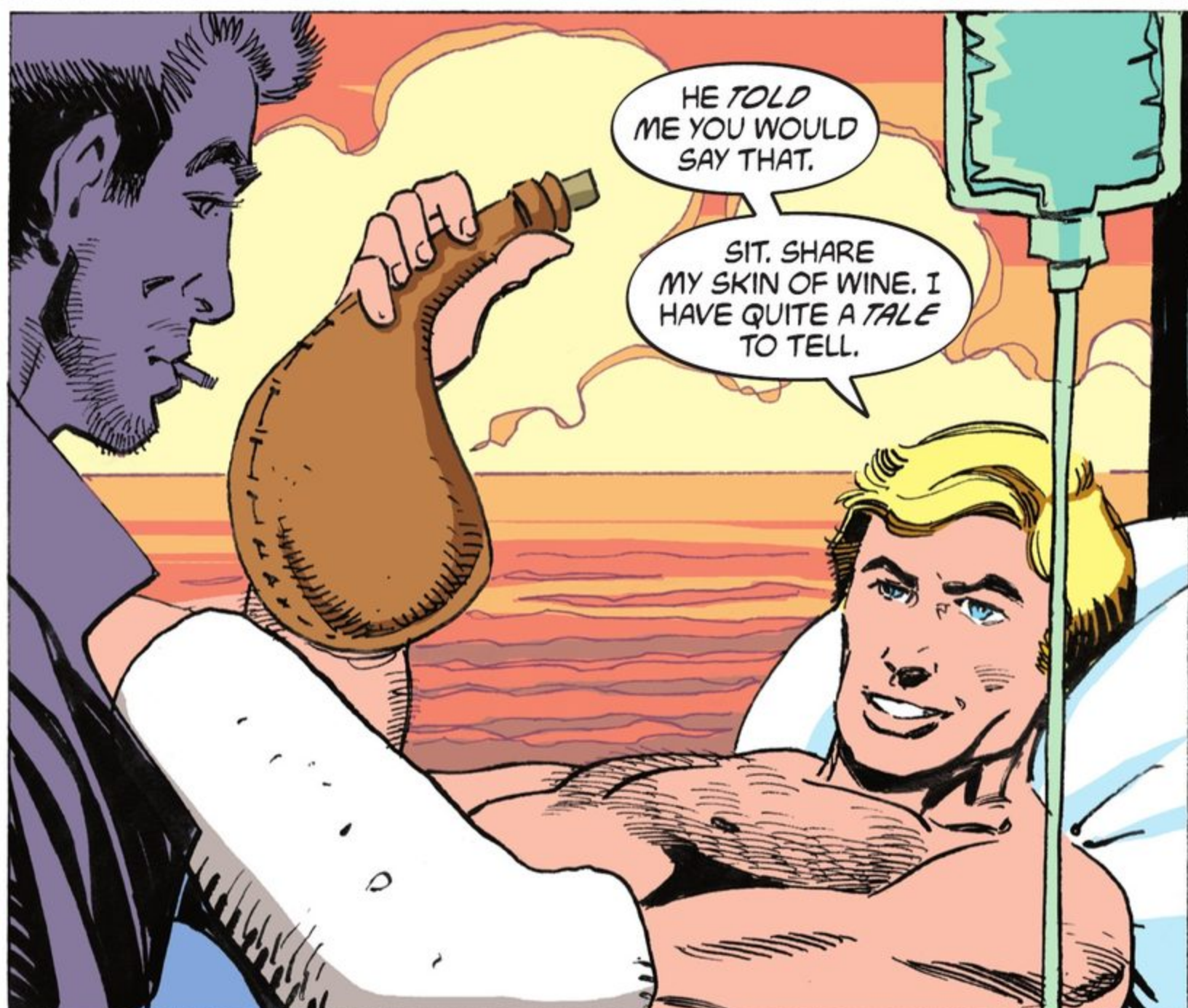
HAS LUCY DIAMOND SKY FINALLY COME TO HER SENSES AND LEFT YOU FOR A NICE MIDLANDS CHAP?

SHE AND MISA ARE DOWN ATTENDING TO OUR TIME TRAVELER.



WORD ON THE CIRCUIT IS YOU'VE TAKEN HIM ON AS ANOTHER ONE OF YOUR PET PROJECTS.

LET'S JUST SAY I'VE GOT A PATERNAL INTEREST IN THE SITUATION.



TIME UPON A ONCE

ARE YOU SURE YOU WOULDN'T RATHER DO THIS IN THE HOUMA HOSPITAL, ABBY?

YEAH. LABO'S ALWAYS BEEN ON THE UP AND UP, BUT THIS PLACE LOOKS A LITTLE SKETCHY, Y'KNOW?

WHEN MATT WAS DYING, I SAW FIRSTHAND WHAT GOES ON IN DR. SAX'S CLINIC, CHESTER.

IT WAS LIKE SOMETHING OUT OF UNCLE ANTON'S WORST FEVER DREAM.

THEY'VE GOT GOOD DRUGS.

NO, I'M DOING THIS STRAIGHT. I WANT MY BABY TO COME INTO THE WORLD AS NATURALLY AS POSSIBLE.

HER TIME IS CLOSE, LIVIE.

MMHMM. NATURE IS STRONG IN THAT GIRL.

BUT NATURE IS BOUNTIFUL TONIGHT. MY BEDS ARE FULL.

MOTHER AND BABY WILL HAVE TO MAKE DO WITH THE STABLE!

UHH, ABBY-- I THINK THE HOSPITAL MIGHT BE A MORE SOLID CHOICE.

MNNEFF!

I SERIOUSLY DON'T THINK THERE'S GOING TO BE TIME FOR ANY OF THAT, CHESTER.

RICK VEITCH
writer

TOM MANDRAKE
artist

TRISH MULVIHILL
colorist

TODD KLEIN
letterer

ALEX GALER
editor

CHRIS CONROY
group editor

Swamp Thing
created by
LEN WEIN and
BERNIE WRIGHTSON

I'VE LANDED IN ANOTHER TIME... ANOTHER PLACE. AND INTO THE HANDS... OF ANOTHER MADMAN.

SYNCHRONIZING MY COMPRESSED TIME PARTICLES WITH YOUR TIME POOL WAS A STROKE OF GENIUS, PROFESSOR HYATT!

I DID IT TO HELP THE ATOM TAKE YOU DOWN A PEG, CHRONOS!

AND I STOLE IT TO PUNCH PALMER'S CLOCK ONCE AND FOR ALL!

MY AURA... SEEKS PURCHASE... IN ANY NEARBY FLORA.

THESE GRAINS OF SAND... THAT HE CALLED TIME PARTICLES... ARE STERILE!

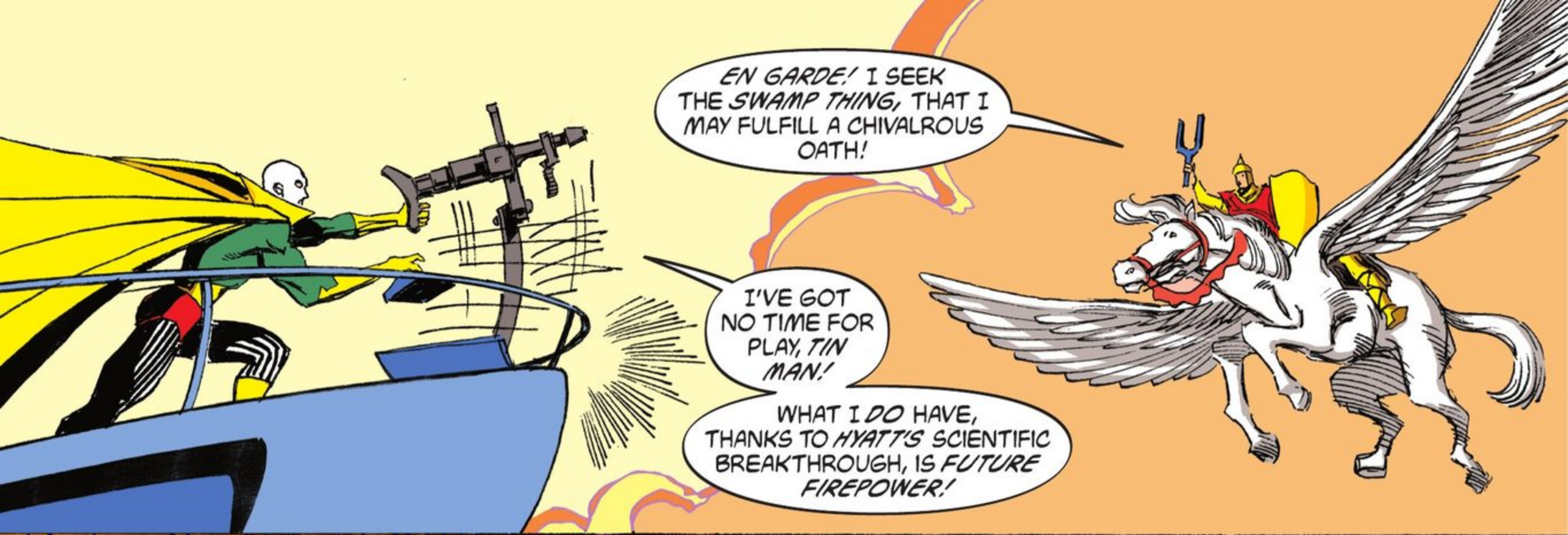
BUT I DON'T BELIEVE THIS LOST SOUL IS GOING TO WIN THE HOUR FOR ME.

I THINK I'LL PASS HIM ON TO WOODRUE, IN THE TIME-HONORED FASHION OF OLD PARTNERS-IN-CRIME.

I NEED... A MIRACLE.

WAIT A TICK. MY TIME-TUNED SENSES ARE PICKING UP AN ODD RHYTHM RISING BEHIND THE NORMAL BACKGROUND TIME TEMPO!

ONWARD, VICTORY! MERLIN'S WIZARDRY ATTUNES US TO OUR QUARRY!



EN GARDE! I SEEK THE SWAMP THING, THAT I MAY FULFILL A CHIVALROUS OATH!

I'VE GOT NO TIME FOR PLAY, TIN MAN!

WHAT I DO HAVE, THANKS TO HYATT'S SCIENTIFIC BREAKTHROUGH, IS FUTURE FIREPOWER!



LIKE THIS MINIGUN FROM THE BATTLEFIELDS OF FUTURE EARTH. IT FIRES SIX THOUSAND ROUNDS A MINUTE. THAT'S ONE HUNDRED A SECOND.

BUT WHO'S COUNTING DOWN?

BRATATAT!



SIR JUSTIN'S ENCHANTED ARMOR... IS BULLETPROOF. BUT NOT EVEN... MERLIN'S MAGIC... CAN HOLD UP... AGAINST THAT KIND OF ONSLAUGHT.

BRATATAT! **VIP!** **BWEEEE!**



IF I CAN JUST... ATTRACT THE ATTENTION... OF THE PROFESSOR!

I DON'T KNOW WHO OR EVEN WHAT YOU ARE IN THAT INFERNAL HOURGLASS.



BUT IF I CAN SET YOU FREE, MAYBE YOU CAN TEACH THAT BULLY CHRONOS SOME MANNERS!



AS MY PRISON SHATTERS...
I SEEK A FOOTHOLD...IN
THIS DRY DESERT WORLD.

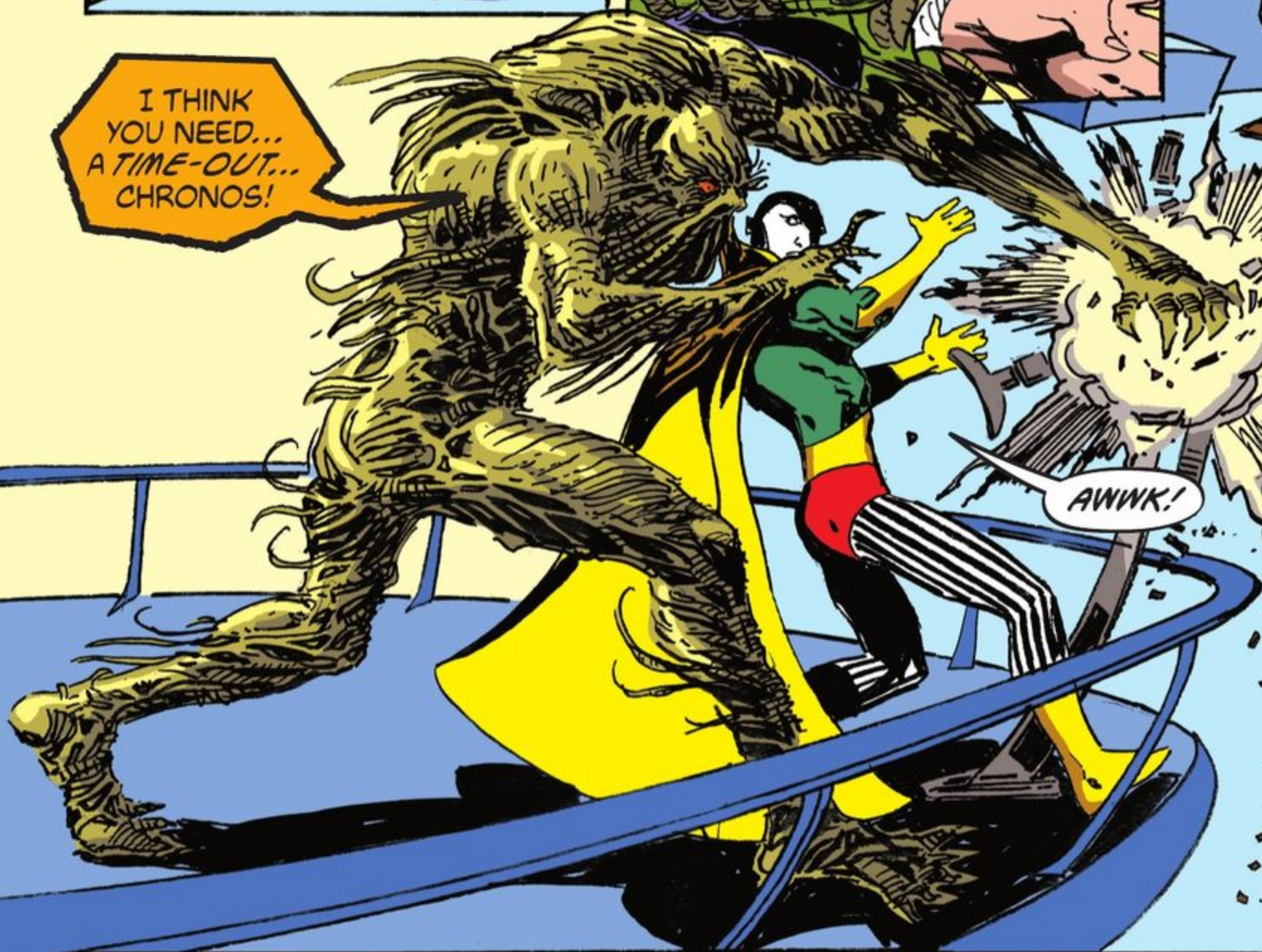


THE PROFESSOR'S
HEMP BINDINGS...
BECOME LIVING
FRACTALS...
GROWING BRAIN
AND BONE.

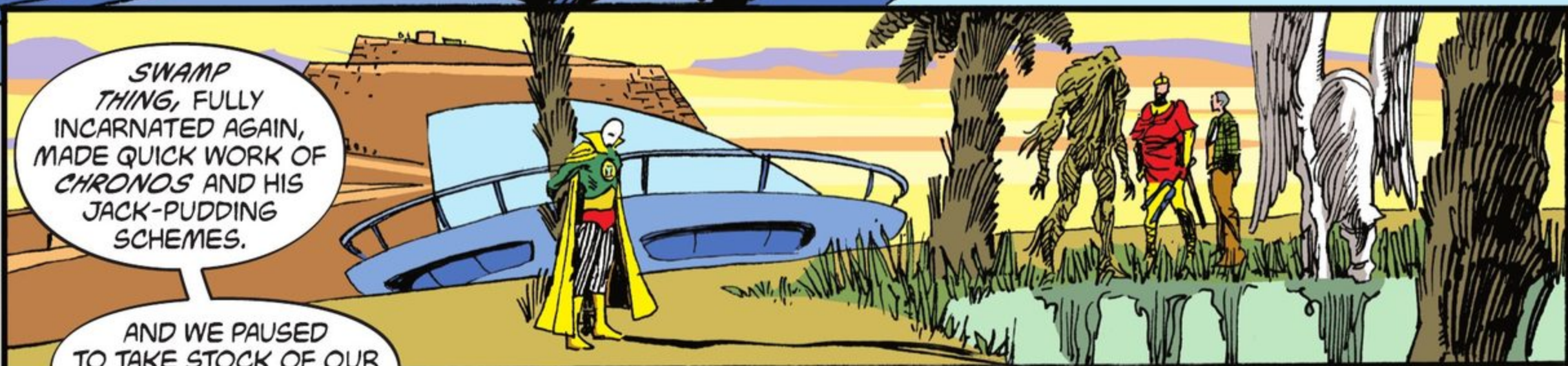


AND SINEW.

I THINK
YOU NEED...
A TIME-OUT...
CHRONOS!



AWWK!



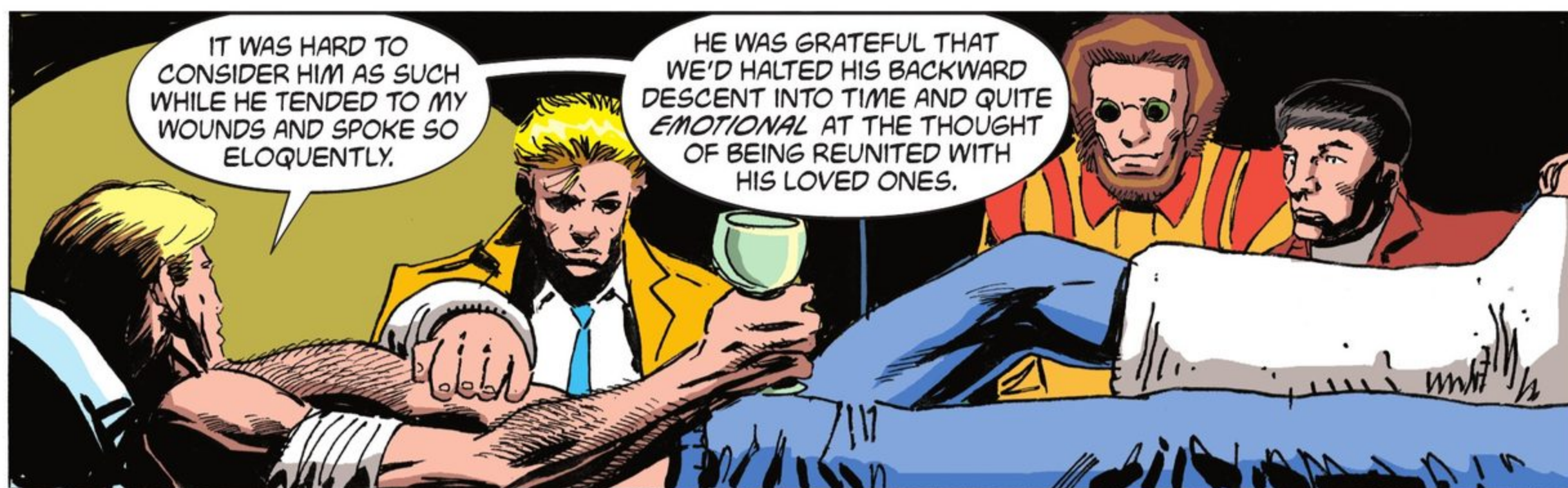
SWAMP
THING, FULLY
INCARNATED AGAIN,
MADE QUICK WORK OF
CHRONOS AND HIS
JACK-PUDDING
SCHEMES.

AND WE PAUSED
TO TAKE STOCK OF OUR
SITUATION IN A NEARBY
OASIS.



PROFESSOR
HYATT EXPLAINED THAT
WE'D STUMBLERD INTO A
FEUD BETWEEN *CHRONOS*
AND THE *ATOM* THAT BEGAN
IN *IVY TOWN* IN THE 1980s
AND LANDED US IN
ANCIENT EGYPT.

WHAT
ABOUT THE
MONSTER?



IT WAS HARD TO CONSIDER HIM AS SUCH WHILE HE TENDED TO MY WOUNDS AND SPOKE SO ELOQUENTLY.

HE WAS GRATEFUL THAT WE'D HALTED HIS BACKWARD DESCENT INTO TIME AND QUITE *EMOTIONAL* AT THE THOUGHT OF BEING REUNITED WITH HIS LOVED ONES.



"HE TOLD US OF HIS LIFE. HOW *YOU*, CONSTANTINE, HAD HELPED HIM REALIZE HIS TRUE SELF.

"HOW HE'D BEEN BLASTED OUT OF HIS ERA BY *ALIEN INVADERS*, AND HOW A PECULIAR PIECE OF *AMBER* KEPT FORCING HIM FURTHER BACKWARD IN THE TIME STREAM.



"BUT MOST OF ALL, HE SEEMED *AWED* BY EVERYTHING HE'D WITNESSED DURING HIS ODYSSEY."

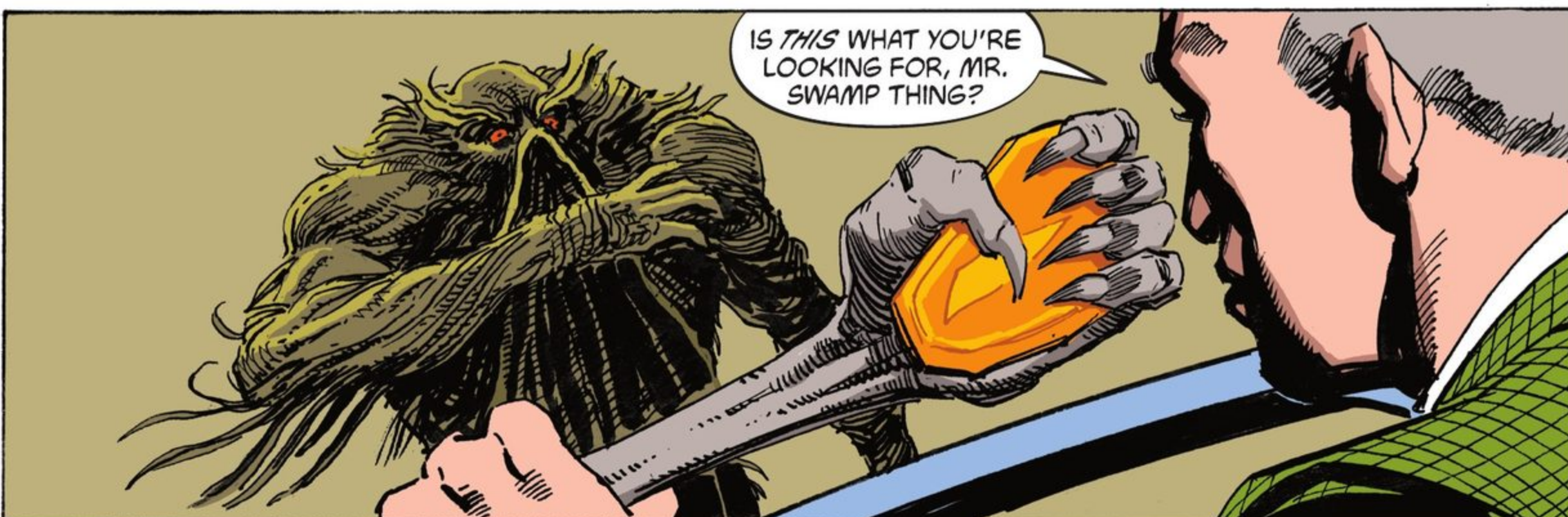
I HAVE SEEN...THE MAGNIFICENT *MULTIVERSE*... AND ITS INFINITE FLOWERING... OF POSSIBLE WORLDS... BRIMMING WITH LIFE.

AND I HAVE MET ONE...WHO *LIVED* IN IT... LIKE NO OTHER...BEFORE OR SINCE.



A PIECE OF *AMBER*, YOU SAY?

CHRONOS PULLED SOMETHING OUT OF THE *TIME POOL* YESTERDAY THAT MIGHT FIT THAT DESCRIPTION.



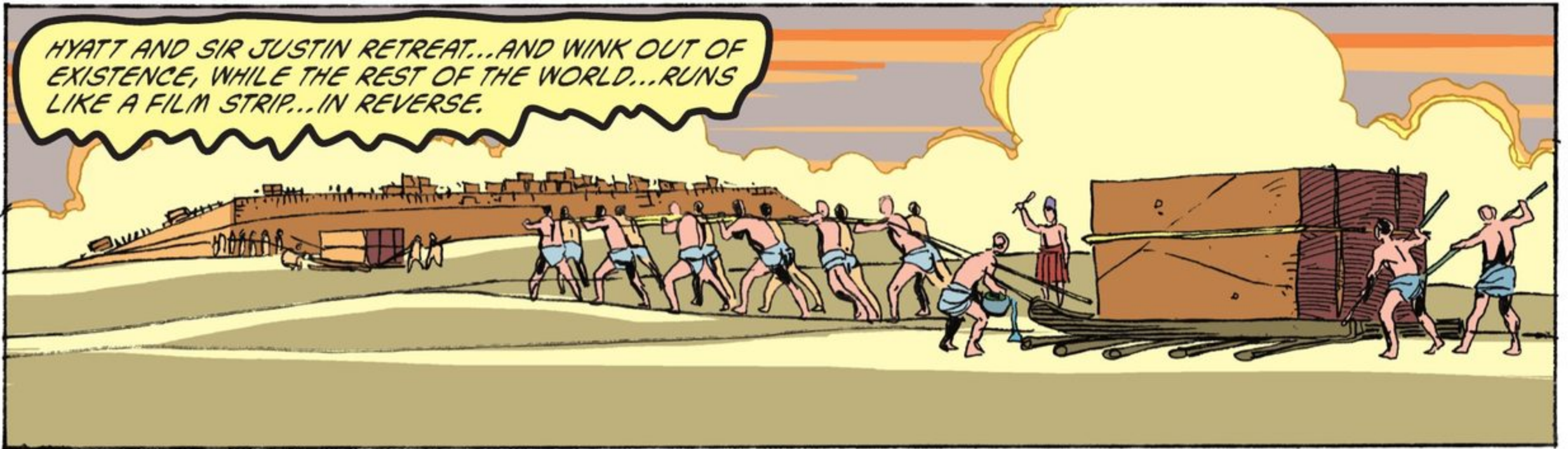
IS *THIS* WHAT YOU'RE LOOKING FOR, MR. SWAMP THING?

THE FOSSILIZED RESIN APPEARS...
YET AGAIN...AS IF ON CUE.

THE COINCIDENCE IS IMPOSSIBLE...BUT THE RAMIFICATIONS ARE
CLEAR. WE CAN NEVER...SHARE THE SAME TIME AND SPACE!



HYATT AND SIR JUSTIN RETREAT...AND WINK OUT OF
EXISTENCE, WHILE THE REST OF THE WORLD...RUNS
LIKE A FILM STRIP...IN REVERSE.



A CIVILIZATION EVAPORATES...
BEFORE MY FROZEN GAZE.

THE CLIMATE CHANGES...AND THE EMPTY DESERT
REGIONS...REWIND INTO FULL BLOOM.



WITH IT COMES...THE
VELVET KISS...OF THE
GREEN. I REACH OUT...
TO SLOW...MY DESCENT.

AND AS IT RECEIVES ME...
IN ITS LIVING EMBRACE...
TIME STOPS HURLING...
IN REVERSE.



AND I COME TO REST...
IN AN EARLIER AGE.



AND YET ANOTHER...UNIQUE FORM.

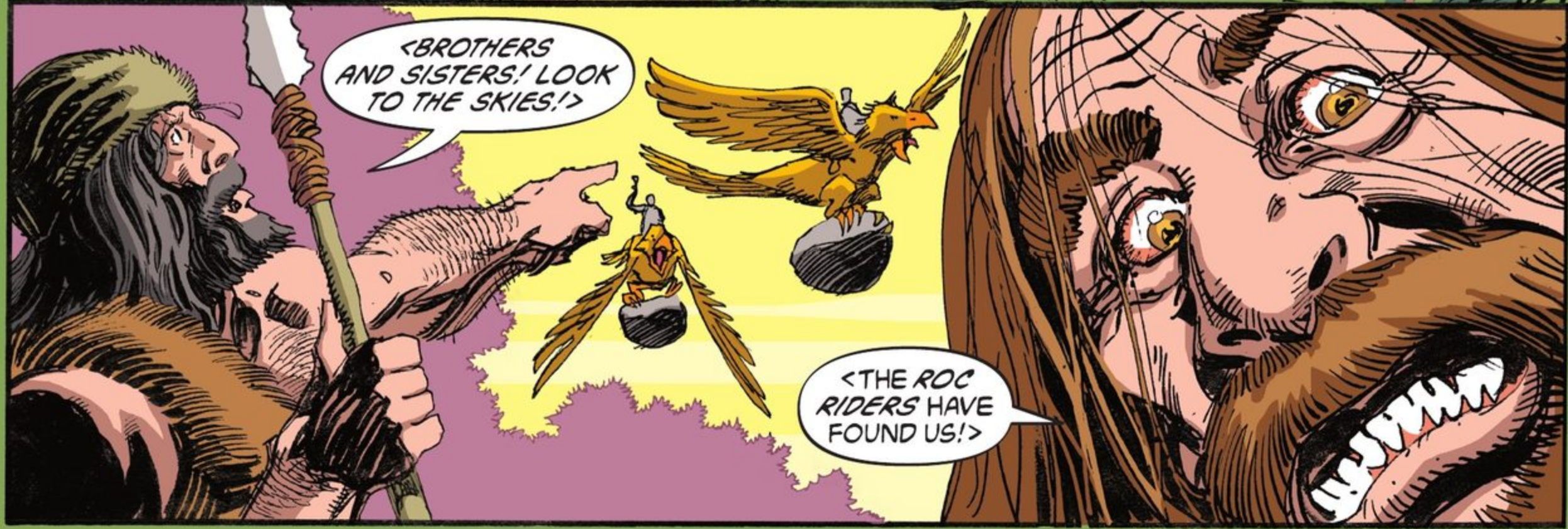


I CAN'T UNDERSTAND...THEIR GUTTURAL LANGUAGE...BUT MY ARRIVAL...SEEMS TO HAVE CAUSED...A COMMOTION...AMONG THE LOCALS.



<THE WEEPING TREE! IT LIVES AGAIN!>

<QUICKLY-- FIND ANTHRO, OUR OLDEST AND WISEST!>



<BROTHERS AND SISTERS! LOOK TO THE SKIES!>

<THE ROC RIDERS HAVE FOUND US!>



<DESTROY
THE IDOL OF THE
DIRT WORSHIPPERS,
MY BROTHERS!>

<TO CRUSH
THE BEAR CLAN WE
FIRST CRUSH THEIR
SPIRIT!>



I TRY TO SUMMON...
THE SURROUNDING
VEGETATION...TO
COMPLETE...THE
BARE BONES...OF
THIS MANNEQUIN
BODY.

BUT SOMETHING...
IS WEAKENING ME.



SOME FORCE IS...TRYING
TO PUSH ME OUT...AND
BACK INTO THE TIME
STREAM AGAIN.

MAKING IT
IMPOSSIBLE...
TO DEFEND
THESE PEOPLE...
OR MYSELF.



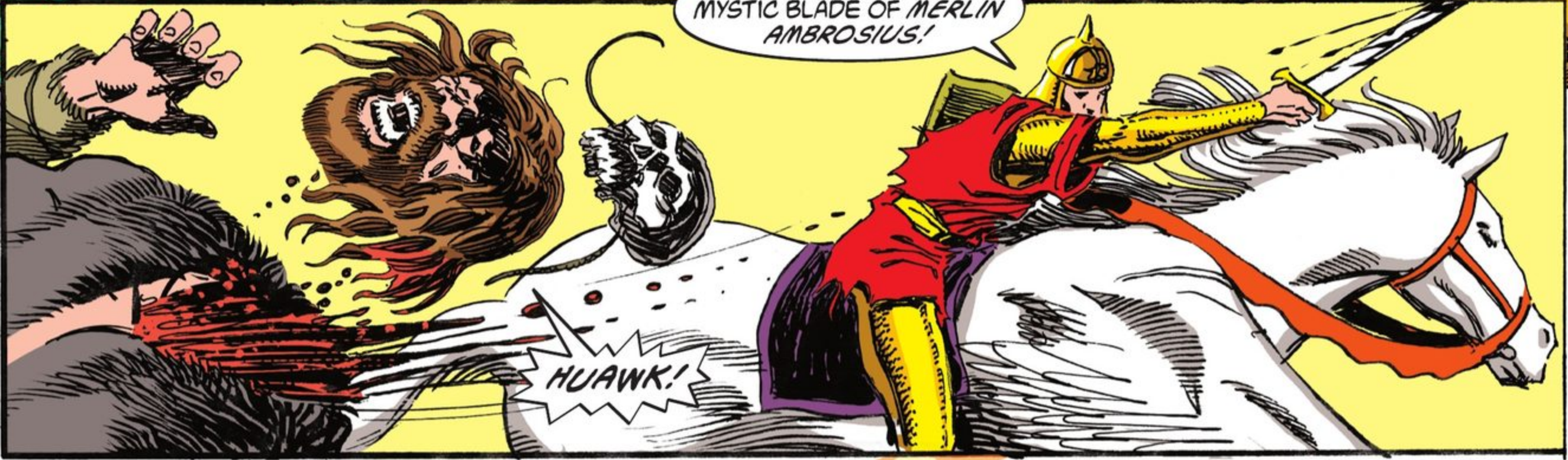
<FRESH MEAT
FOR OUR CAMPS! FRESH
WOMEN FOR US!>

THOU SHALT
SLAUGHTER NO MORE
INNOCENTS, FOUL
OGRES!



NOT WHILE SHINING KNIGHT UPHOLDS THE ARTHURIAN CODE OF FABLED CAMELOT!

AND WIELDS THE MYSTIC BLADE OF MERLIN AMBROSIOUS!



HUAWK!



SIR JUSTIN HAS FOUND ME... YET AGAIN!

THAT'S...THE GOOD NEWS.



THE BAD NEWS IS...SOME UNKNOWN POWER...LEAVES ME UNABLE TO HELP HIM... FEND OFF HIS ASSAILANTS.

<OH, WEEPING TREE!>



<IT IS YOU, OLD FRIEND.>



<I DON'T NEED EYES OR EARS TO RECOGNIZE YOUR SOUL.>

<OUR SPIRITS TWINED WHEN YOU WERE OLD AND I WAS YOUNG. SURELY YOU REMEMBER ANTHRO?>



I DON'T NEED TO... COMPREHEND HIS GRUNTS...TO SEE THAT THE OLD MAN KNEW ME.

<FOR MANY SEASONS I HAVE HELD THE MEMORY OF WEEPING TREE HERE...>



<...CLOSE TO MY BROKEN HEART.>

CLEARLY...I WAS A VERY IMPORTANT PART...OF HIS PAST!



<I ALWAYS KNEW THE HEART OF WEEPING TREE WAS BROKEN TOO.>

SO IT IS NOT ENTIRELY UNEXPECTED...



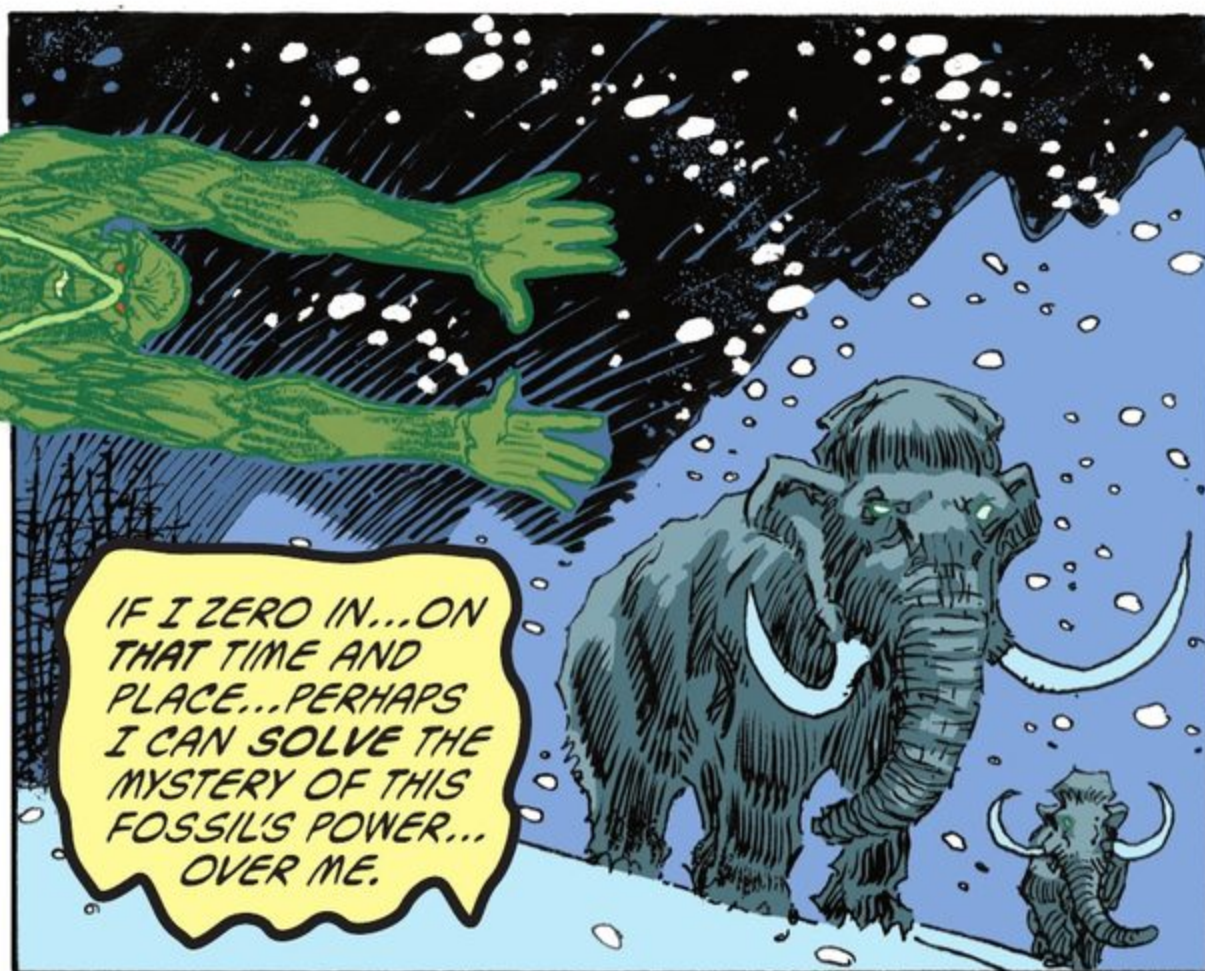
<I SAVED ONE OF YOUR TEARS.>

...TO ONCE AGAIN...BE CONFRONTED WITH THE AMBER...AND FLUNG LIKE A LEAF...ON THE WINDS OF TIME.

AT SOME POINT...DURING THAT
OLD MAN'S LIFESPAN...WE MET.



IF I ZERO IN...ON
THAT TIME AND
PLACE...PERHAPS
I CAN SOLVE THE
MYSTERY OF THIS
FOSSIL'S POWER...
OVER ME.

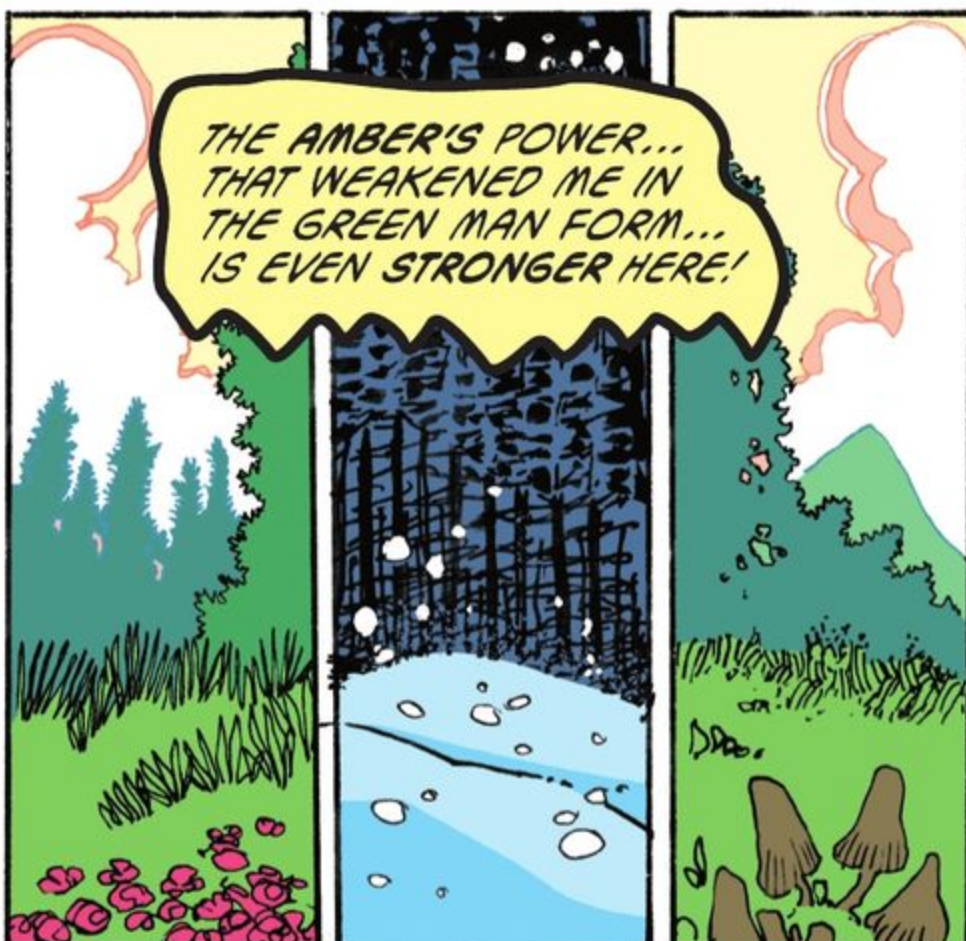


ONCE BEFORE...I WAS
ABLE TO...ANCHOR
MYSELF TO THE GREEN...
AND STOP MY BACK-
WARD MOMENTUM.

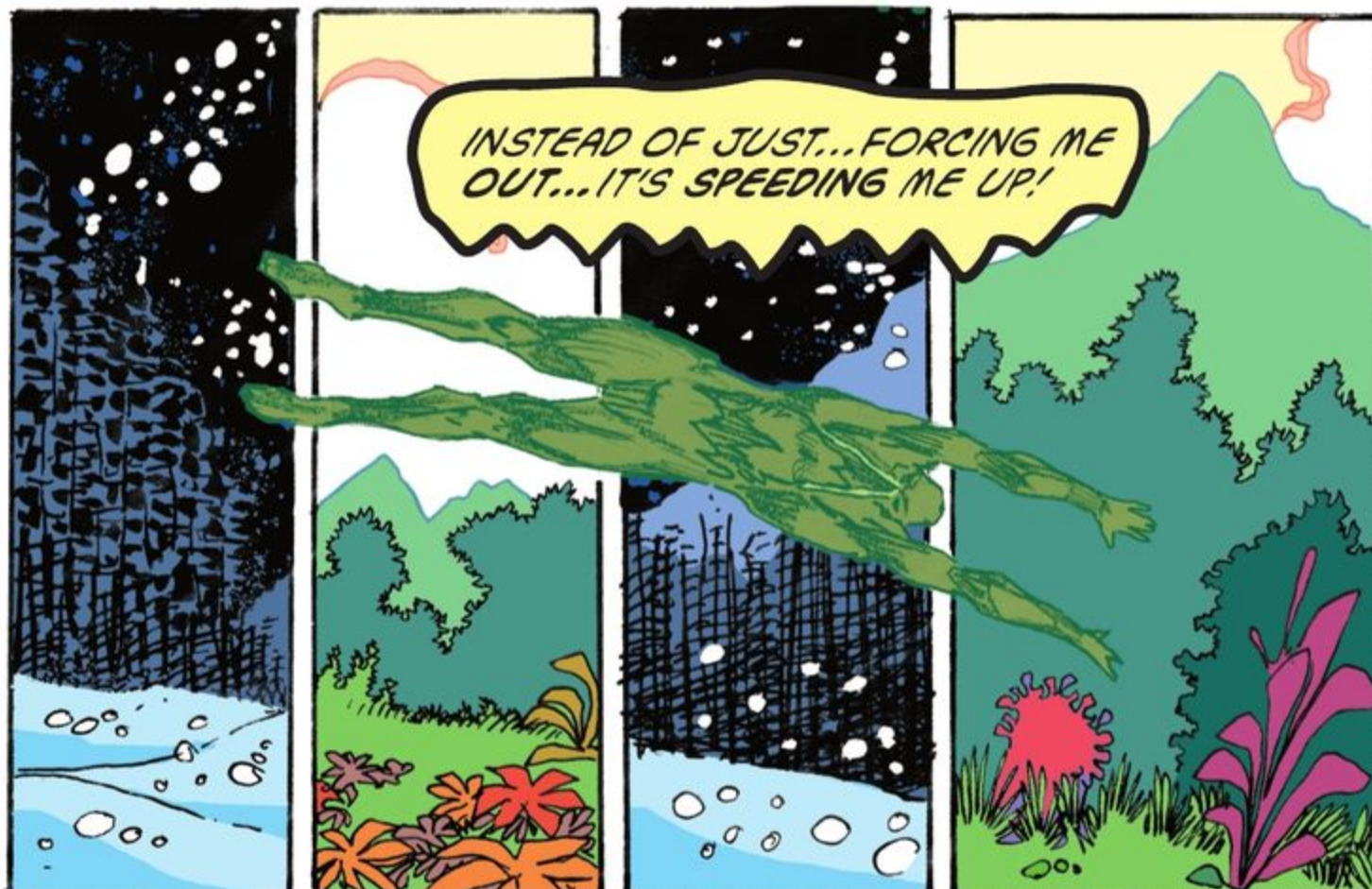
BUT THIS TIME...SOME-
THING IS DIFFERENT!



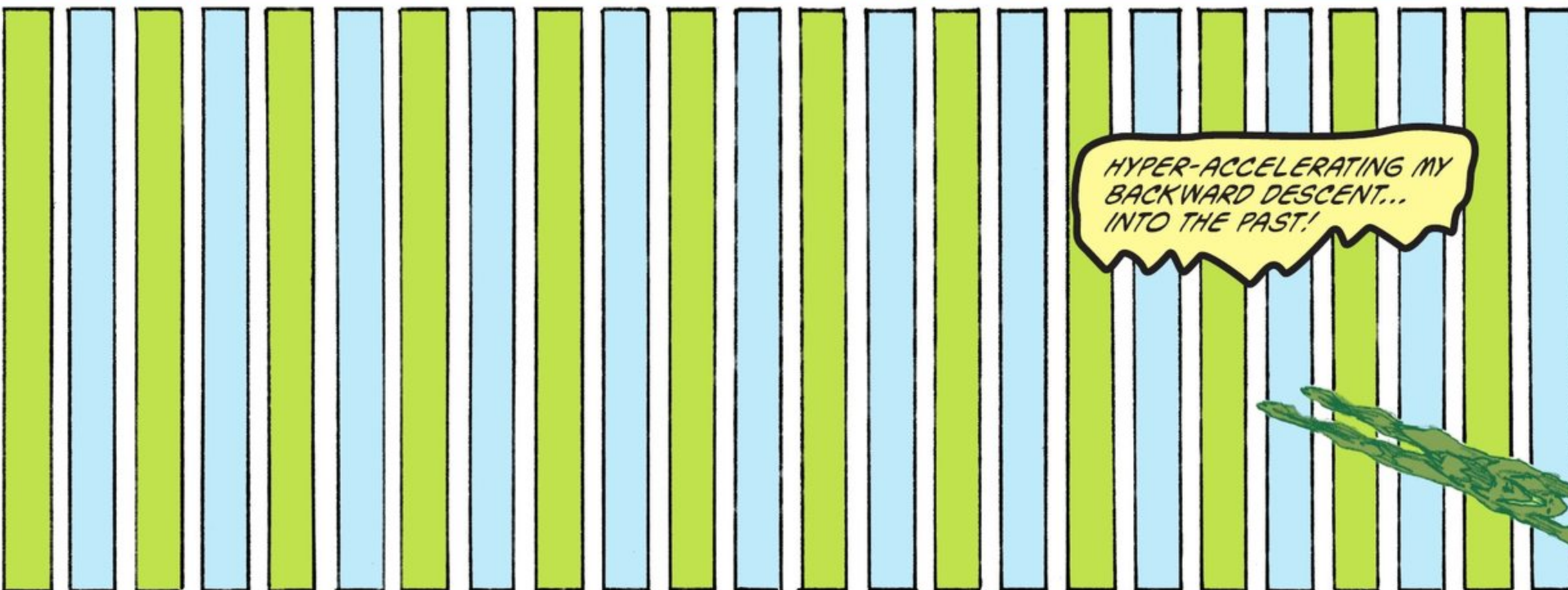
THE AMBER'S POWER...
THAT WEAKENED ME IN
THE GREEN MAN FORM...
IS EVEN STRONGER HERE!



INSTEAD OF JUST...FORCING ME
OUT...IT'S SPEEDING ME UP!



HYPER-ACCELERATING MY
BACKWARD DESCENT...
INTO THE PAST!





EONS STROBE BY... FASTER AND FASTER. CONTINENTS SHATTER AND SHIFT... AS THE ANTEDILUVIAN SEAS RISE AND FALL.

THE AGE OF MAMMALS DEVOLVES... TO THE REIGN OF REPTILES... IN THE BLINK OF AN EYE.

AS MY VELOCITY INCREASES... COMPLEX LIFE-FORMS DEGENERATE INTO SINGLE-CELLED CREATURES... FIRST INHALING EARTH'S VIRGIN OXYGEN.

HURTLING BACKWARD... I WATCH THE GREEN WITHER LIKE DYING SLIME MOLD... REPLACED BY A SEETHING, SULFUROUS HELLSCAPE... BOILING OUT OF THE PLANET'S MOLTEN HEART.

IN A FLASH, THE MOON DISAPPEARS... UNDER A CELESTIAL IMPLOSION... SWALLOWING WITH IT EVERY DREAM... THAT WILL EVER BE DREAMT.



IN A HEARTBEAT...THE HEAVING PROTO-EARTH DISSOLVES...INTO STARDUST CAUGHT...IN CONCENTRIC RINGS OF SOLAR GRAVITY.

FOR A NANOSECOND IT ALL PINWHEELS...BEFORE THE STAR AT ITS CENTER...EVAPORATES INTO AN EXPANDING NEBULA...OF HYDROGEN AND HELIUM.

IN A PICOSECOND...THE WHOLE GALAXY...BIRTH-PLACE OF A HUNDRED BILLION STARS...FOLLOWS SUIT LIKE A SPUTTERING ROMAN CANDLE.

SUPERCLUSTERS RAPIDLY CONTRACT...INTO REDSHIFT RAGS AND REMNANTS...OF COSMIC BACKGROUND RADIATION.

AND ALL THAT'S LEFT...IS THE LOOMING SINGULARITY...WHERE SPATIOTEMPORAL REALITY...ULTIMATELY RUNS OUT!



I RAN THROUGH THE LAST OF THE *ROC RIDERS*, BUT WAS TOO LATE TO STOP THE MYSTERIOUS FOSSIL FROM LAUNCHING *SWAMP THING* BACK INTO THE PAST.



"I ONLY WISH I'D HAD THE PRESENCE OF MIND TO *RETRIEVE* THE THING BEFORE SPURRING MY CHARGER INTO THE BOWELS OF TIME.



"IT TOOK EVERYTHING VICTORY *HAD*, BUT WE FINALLY CAUGHT UP WITH HIS GHOSTLY FIGURE DESCENDING THROUGH THE EARLIEST EPOCHS OF CREATION.

"WHEN MATTER ITSELF WAS BARELY FORMING FROM THE SEETHING SEAS OF PLASMA.



"CAUGHT IN THE FURIOUS CURRENT OF TIME DRAINING AWAY, WE CLOSED SO AS TO HAIL EACH OTHER."

GO BACK, SIR JUSTIN...IT'S HOPELESS!



PLEASE FIND *ABBY*!



TELL
HER... I'M
SORRY!

TELL HER...
AND THE BABY...
I LO...



AND SO HE DISAPPEARED INTO THAT
MOMENT WHEN GOD FIRST SAID, "LET
THERE BE LIGHT."

I BELIEVE YOU
FUTURE FOLK REFER TO IT
AS THE *BIG BANG*.

I THINK WE
CAN AGREE THERE'S
NO COMING BACK
FROM *THAT*.



MAYBE.

I'D QUITE LIKE
TO HEAR MORE ABOUT
THIS BIT OF FOSSILIZED
AMBER.



IT'S THE PART OF THE
FAIRY TALE THAT'S GOT ME
BREATHIN' HARD.



!HUFF!:
!HUFF! !HUFF!:
!HUFF!:

THAT'S IT, ABBY!
BREEEEAATHE!

EACH ONE'S
GETTING MORE INTENSE. I
HOPE I CAN DO THIS.

THAT'S WHERE
THE LAMAZE EXERCISES ARE
GOING TO PAY OFF!

CONTRACTIONS
ARE JUST UNDER TEN
MINUTES APART. YOU'VE
GOT A WAYS TO GO YET.



WHAT WAS I *THINKING*? THAT I
COULD HAVE ALEC'S ELEMENTAL BABY
AND EVERYTHING WOULD SOMEHOW
BE ALL RIGHT?

YOU CAN'T
WORRY ABOUT THE
PAST, ABBY.

YOU NEED
TO BE HERE NOW.
AND BRING THIS KID
INTO THE WORLD.



WHAT KIND OF A WORLD,
CHESTER? WHAT KIND OF
FUTURE?

IT'S GOING
TO BE LIKE
IT'S *ALWAYS*
BEEN.

A LIFE SPENT
FIGHTING MONSTERS
AND DEPRAVITY.



SO HOW
ARE MOTHER
AND FATHER
DOING OUT
HERE?

UHH. I'M
NOT ACTUALLY,
Y'KNOW...THE
FATHER. WE'RE
JUST FAMILY
FRIENDS,
SORT OF...

THE SITUATION IS
A LITTLE...COMPLICATED.



YOU'RE ONLY
AT FIVE CENTIMETERS.
YOU'VE A LONG NIGHT OF
WOMEN'S WORK
BEFORE BABY
COMES.



BUT HERE, WITH YOU,
GIRL, I SENSE HER ESPECIALLY...
IN ATTENDANCE.

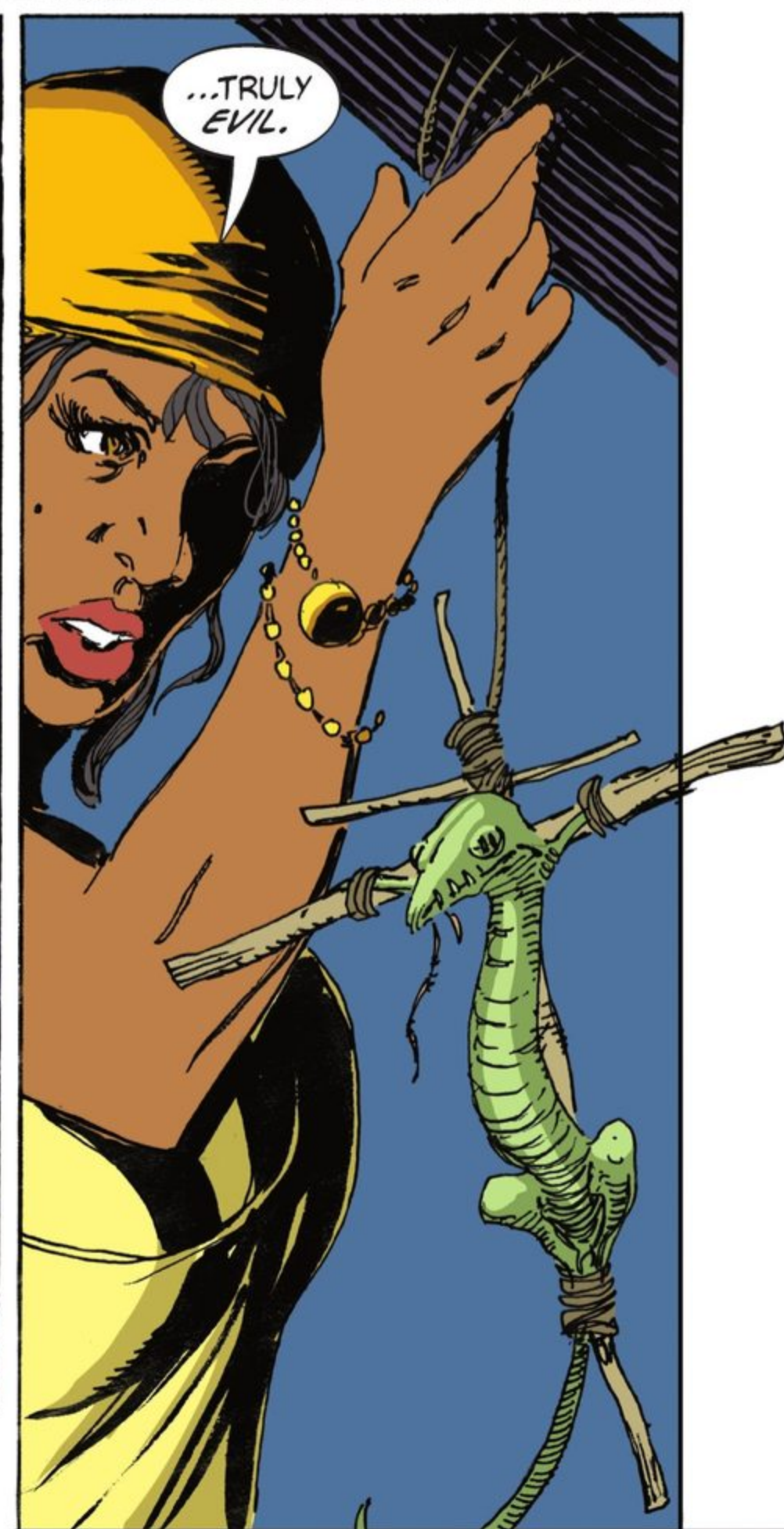


AAA000WWW:

**BREATHE,
ABBY!**



SOMETHING...
SOMETHING...



IN HELL.

ME!
HUBERT SAX! I WAS
RESPONSIBLE!

FOR ALL
THOSE AGONIZING
DEATHS!

I RAN A NEO-MORT
PROGRAM! IT KEPT DYING
PEOPLE ALIVE ONLY SO WE
COULD HARVEST THEIR
ORGANS.

AND
SELL THEM FOR
PROFIT!

I WAS THE
CHIEF OPERATIONS
OFFICER AT TERRE-
BONNE PARISH
GENERAL HOSPITAL!
I CALLED THE
SHOTS!

WAIT A
MINUTE.

AS
IN HOUMA?
IN LOUISIANA,
USA?

YES!
EVERY ONE OF
MY VICTIMS SUFFERED
EXCRUCIATINGLY SLOW
DEATHS NEED-
LESSLY!

DOES THE
NAME MATT CABLE
RING ANY BELLS?

Next: **SOURCE and SORCERY!**



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When I heard from Alex Galer that after all these years the final issues of Rick Veitch's *Swamp Thing* were going to be completed, I was immediately excited. Tremendous news! Well, to be fair, I'd always thought the unpublished issue Michael Zulli pencilled but never inked was the last issue. Finding out that there was more story to tell and that Rick and Alex wanted me to complete the run was a thrill and a real full-circle moment for me.

I was never the regular artist on Rick's *Swamp Thing* run, nor any run of *Swamp Thing* for that matter. I filled in here and there between 1982 and 1992, starting when Jan Duursema and I were offered *The Saga of the Swamp Thing* #9, written by Marty Pasko, and continuing with various issues through Rick's issues, Nancy A. Collins's, and others. I pencilled issues, working mostly with Alfredo Alcalá inking, although Kim DeMulder and a few others were in there inking away as well, and always the great Tatjana Wood on colors and John Costanza lettering. John lived one town over from me, and I would often just drive pencils over to his house for him to letter, back in the days when the lettering was done on the art boards.

There was a moment, I believe while Nancy A. Collins was writing, when Karen Berger offered me the book as the regular penciller. I turned it down. While I greatly appreciated the offer, my determination to find a regular gig that I could both pencil and ink led directly to me picking up *Firestorm* with John Ostrander, but that's another story altogether!

So now I find myself with the opportunity to help complete one of the great unfinished stories in comics. The idea of picking up on something from almost 40 years ago was a bit daunting. The demons in my head immediately started asking questions: Should I try to channel 1980s Tom Mandrake? Can I still draw like that? Do I want to? Should I try to ink like Alfredo Alcalá? He was the unifying look of the book for most, if not all, of those years. For that matter, *can* I ink like Alfredo Alcalá, or would that be a mistake? Ultimately, I decided to lean into his style...a bit, what I consider a tip of the hat to his dominant inking style while still being me. It was easy for me to say yes to this project, but then I suffered with way more internal dialogue and self-doubt than I usually deal with.

Swamp Thing himself has changed quite a bit physically over the years—sometimes smooth, sometimes covered with roots and vines. Throughout the Veitch years he stood tall and erect, but in the years since he's developed the *Swamp Thing* hunch I've certainly adopted in my

current version. I had to retrain myself to get back to that earlier look.

There was a lot to live up to here, a lot of homework to do. I really needed to spend some time looking back at not just the issues I drew but the entire run, Rick's intricately layered story, full of time jumps, multiple dimensions, and characters who appear at different times in their lives. There was so much to catch up with, so much to remember. Thankfully, Alex Galer diligently tracked down every issue in the run and I got to read the whole thing all over again. Talk about a great homework assignment!

What a great team to be a part of! I've known Rick ever since my years at the Kubert School in the '70s. Alex is an old-school editor in the best way possible, interested and involved, providing intelligent notes and caring so much about the work. The great Todd Klein, whom I've been fortunate enough to work with many times, created a font to match up with John Costanza's letters, and when I saw that lettering on the art I felt like I had gone back in time. Of course, all the hard work Trish Mulvihill has put into not just her great coloring but finding a way to make 2025-2026 digital coloring reflect '80s coloring is amazing.

I would be remiss not to mention the huge impact Michael Zulli's passing had; that it came while we were working on this project added a gravitas to the work. Vince Locke stepping up in such a big way with his beautiful inks was more than impressive.

While I never had a long run on *Swamp Thing*, my relationship with the character stretches farther across my professional career than that with any other DC character. This has been a special moment in that relationship and has come with special people, and I thank all of them for a great ride!

—Tom Mandrake

* * * * *

It was a gift to be asked to do finishes on *Swamp Thing* #88—a once-in-a-career project with immense weight. *Swamp Thing* is a series most artists dream of being able to work on. I have been a fan of Rick Veitch's work since his time at *Epic Illustrated*, the magazine that got me interested in drawing comics. Then there's Michael Zulli. I didn't realize (or I forgot) that he had pencilled that fabled lost issue of *Swamp Thing*. I always enjoyed working with Michael. He pushed my inks to a level

I couldn't achieve on my own. Our collaborations on *Witchcraft: La Terreur* and *The Sandman Presents: Love Street* are still some of my best work.

Hearing that Michael was working on redrawing that issue when he passed away got me all choked up. Karen Zulli, Michael's wife, said he kept those pencils loose because he didn't want anyone else to ink them. I've seen the pencils, and they're beautiful!

In planning their next steps toward publishing *Swamp Thing* #88, Alex Galer, Rick, and Karen decided to go back to those original pencils from 1989. It seemed like the right choice for Michael and for the fans. However, no one was able to track down those original pencils, so I had to work from the 40-year-old grainy, washed-out xeroxes.

Working over those old xeroxes was a challenge. Most everything was there, though some bits took a while to decipher. I often referred to Michael's new pencils to help figure out his intentions, especially when minor changes were needed. Most of Michael's delicate linework was lost in the old xeroxes, so I referred to our previous work together to keep his aesthetic in my mind. I had some of our original pages from *Witchcraft* and *Love Street* propped up and scattered around my drawing table. I didn't want to imitate him. Instead, I wanted *Swamp Thing* #88 to be a final collaboration—one where I was a part of it but Michael still shines through.

I reinked panels and pages throughout the book. I would be halfway through inking a page and think to myself, "It's not good enough." Then I'd set it aside and start over. I was so picky that to most eyes, any changes I made were practically unnoticeable. The pressure I felt to honor Michael while working with Rick and sharing the work with Michael's widow Karen, as well as trying to meet fan expectations, was enormous.

It took a few pages to figure out the best way to work. It went like this: I would print out the original xerox in blue and then pencil directly over that. Then I would scan those pencils and convert them to bluelines again and pencil a second time. That allowed me to still see Michael's art while working all the way through. Additionally, I had copies of the old xeroxes next to me all the time to constantly refer to. Hopefully, all this kept me from overpowering Michael's work.

I remember when I turned in my first batch of pages on *Witchcraft*. Michael called me up to say how much he liked them. I commented on how the line directions were odd and I had to turn the pages upside down to ink them. It had never occurred to me that left-handed drawing would be different! So I tried my best to keep Michael's left-handed line slant in the work. It was one of those details most people wouldn't notice but needed to be there.

Working on this project was highly emotional for me. I would relive conversations with Michael in my head about art and inking, our inspirations and frustrations. I couldn't help but wonder what he was going through as he worked on redrawing the story amid his health issues. After all the

controversy over the story, it's surprisingly reverent and spiritual. Frequently, I saw hidden meaning and correlations that would get me choked up to the point I had to stop work and clear my head. All the stress was self-inflicted but hard to shake.

Thank you to Alex Galer for letting me have the time I needed to complete the job (far more time than I've ever put into a single issue) and for all the help on researching characters to put into those alt-Earth bubbles.

Thanks to Rick Veitch for years of inspiration and allowing me to be part of one of the most legendary stories in comics.

Thanks to Trish Mulvihill for doing a beautiful job matching the 1980s coloring style of Tatjana Wood, creating a seamless look between 1989 and 2026.

Thanks to Todd Klein for his terrific work matching John Costanza's lettering, again creating a cohesive thread between 37 years.

Thanks to Karen Zulli for her constant support and reassurance that I was honoring Michael.

And thanks to Michael for the work, teaching, friendship, and collaboration. You made me a better artist. For years I waited/hoped for a call from you saying, "I'm starting a new project. Are you up for inking it?" It's bittersweet that the call came after you'd passed away to finish a project you started 37 years ago. I hope this final collaboration is a worthy addition to your legacy.

—Vince Locke

* * * * *

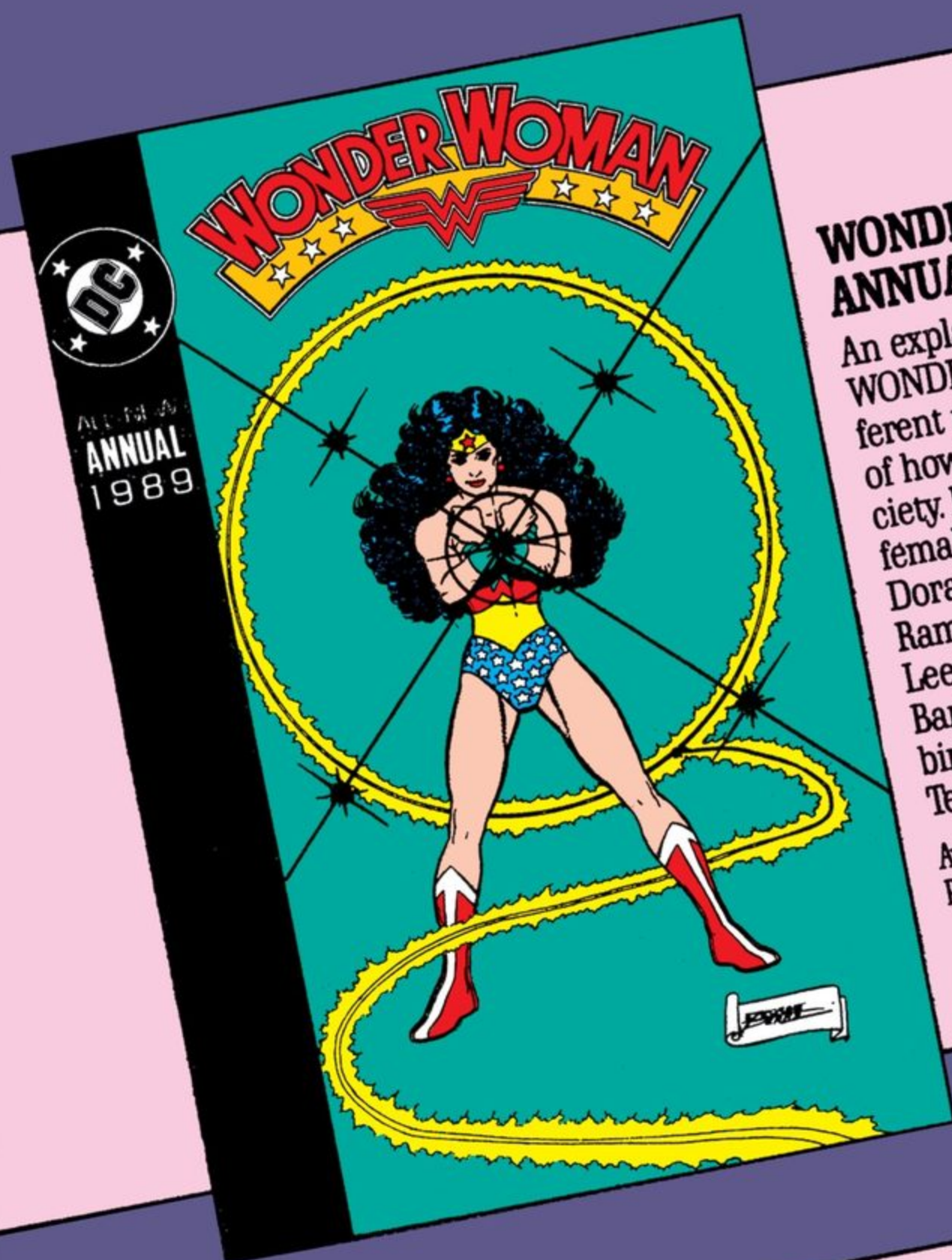


Portrait of
Michael Zulli by
Vince Locke



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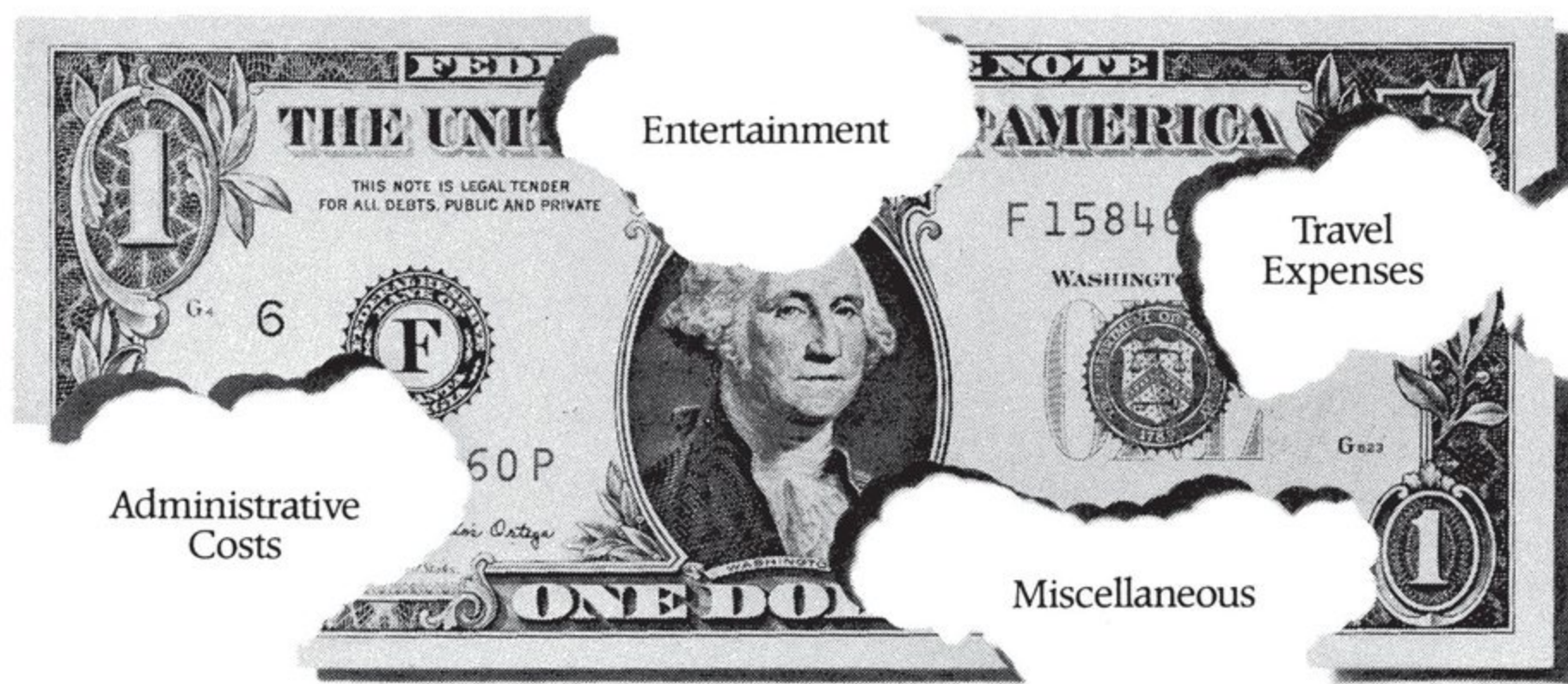
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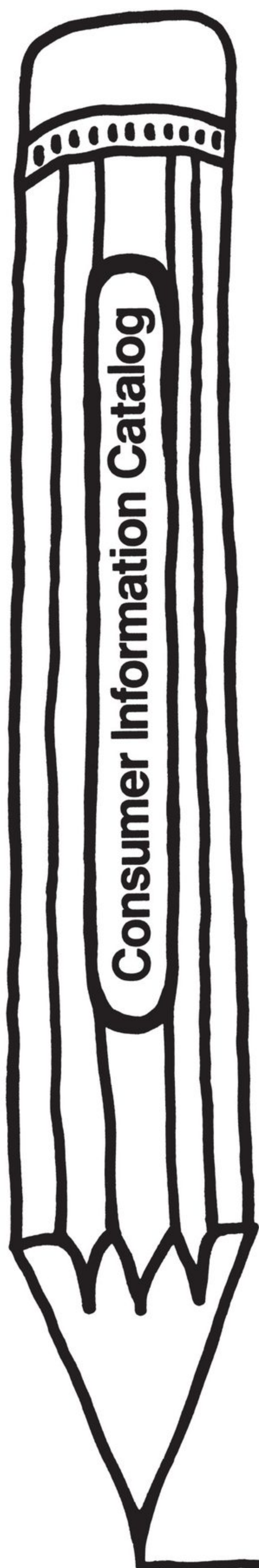


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